

NEW YORK
HERALD TRIBUNE

FEB 13 1964

CPYRGHT

Baker Case—Top-Level Smear Memo

CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT

"I feel you should be aware of some of the circumstances surrounding the military service of former Maj. Don B. Reynolds, who testified before the Senate Rules Committee in the Bobby Baker case. . . ."

By Dom Bonafede
Of The Herald Tribune Staff
WASHINGTON.

An Air Force memo said to impugn the character of a key witness in the Bobby Baker investigation kicked up a storm yesterday in the controversy over unauthorized release of secret government files.

Neither the White House nor the Pentagon would say if such a memo existed.

However, copies were attached to columns written by columnist Drew Pearson Feb. 5 and 6 as part of a confidential memorandum to editors.

Dated Jan. 24, the memo was addressed to Air Force Secretary Eugene M. Zuckert. It purportedly said in part, "I feel you should be aware of

some of the circumstances surrounding the military service of former Maj. Don B. Reynolds, who testified before the Senate Rules Committee in the Bobby Baker case

the day before yesterday."

The memo was signed by Benjamin W. Fridge, special assistant to the Secretary of the Air Force for manpower and reserve forces.

Mr. Pearson's columns questioned the reliability and past of Mr. Reynolds, a Silver Spring, Md., insurance man whose testimony in the Baker case disclosed a gift of a stereo phonograph to President Johnson in 1959 when he was Senate Majority leader, and detailed the purchase of advertising time on the LBJ Co.'s TV station in Austin, Tex.

The columns, reportedly based on official files from the Pentagon, FBI and State Department, created a wave of criticism directed at the White House for what was interpreted to be an underhanded effort to discredit Mr. Reynolds' testimony.

When questioned yesterday about the Air Force memo and its relationship to leaks in government personnel data, Assistant Defense Secretary Arthur Sylvester replied he had no knowledge of the memo.

"I haven't the slightest idea I'd be able to get that, and I would be disinclined to ask for it because this is completely internal within the Defense Department," he commented.

Pressed further, Mr. Sylvester said, "I'd be happy to check on whether such a memo exists."

"There's no showing that Mr. Fridge's memo—if there is a memo—was the source" of Mr. Pearson's columns, he remarked.

He said no investigation of a possible security breach was being contemplated by the Pentagon.

Ordinarily, the unauthorized release of secret files in the Pentagon is investigated by the Security and Review Office under Mr. Sylvester.

When reporters continued to question him about the matter, Mr. Sylvester said, "We're not about to insert ourselves in Senate committee affairs."

At 7:20 p. m. he told the New York Herald Tribune, "I'm still checking."

During yesterday's regular White House briefing, a question was asked about the memo.

"I have said all I am going to say about that," declared press secretary Pierre Salinger.

This was in reference to two denials by the White House that it was in any way involved in a leak of confidential information about Mr. Reynolds.

A portion of the reporters' exchange with Mr. Sylvester went as follows:

Q. Who in defense requested the files, and where is the file now?

A. I'm not sure that anybody made a request for his record.

Q. Did you hear that a Mr. Fridge called the attention of the Secretary of the Air Force to Mr. Reynolds' record?

A. No.

Q. You never heard of that before?

A. I did not. I do not know that Mr. Fridge called the Secretary's attention to it.

Q. You haven't heard before now that Mr. Fridge had done so?

A. I simply say to you that I am not aware Mr. Fridge had done so. I've seen allegations that he had done so, but I'm not aware that he actually did.

Later, a reporter said, "... This is a government agency. Art, and the movement of a man's record is a matter of public interest in this matter.

A. Your question is not—is a fishing question.

Q. No, it isn't.

A. And this record over the last 11 years could have been moved several times. Now whom are you thinking moved it, and what day are you talking about?

Q. I'm asking if it was moved in the last few weeks.

A. I'm afraid I can't be helpful on that.

Q. Could you be helpful and check whether or not Mr. Fridge wrote a memo to the Secretary of the Air Force in which he outlined some of the background of Mr. Reynolds, the witness in the Bobby Baker case, and to whom did he write this memo?

A. To whom did he write the memo?

Q. Secretary of the Air Force Eugene Zuckert.

A. Let's understand ourselves here. Mr. Reynolds is a witness before a Senate committee which has this problem, and we're not about to insert ourselves in a Senate committee or make any comment on it. . . ."

Continued

CPYRGHT

In his two articles, columnist Pearson reported that Mr. Reynolds was an unreliable witness because of reckless charges he made against people in the past, accusing them of being Communists and sex deviates.

While serving as a major in the Air Force during the Korean conflict, Mr. Reynolds testified before the McCarran Internal Security subcommittee.

In a recent defense of his testimony, Mr. Reynolds said that most of the people he named before the committee were dropped from the service as being security risks.

Mr. Fridge is serving his second term as a civilian executive in the Defense Department. From 1957 to 1960 he served as deputy for Reserve and ROTC affairs, office of the Secretary of the Air Force.

After leaving the department, he became assistant to the president of the W. H. Singleton Co. Then, on June 19, 1961, he was appointed to his present position.

He was born in Alexandria, La., and was graduated from Louisiana State University in 1938 with a Bachelor of Science degree. During World War II he was a pilot in command of a bomber group.

Mr. Fridge and Secretary Zuckert were unavailable for comment. A spokesman for Mr. Zuckert declined to comment.

FEB 13 1964